



Neighborhood Know-How: Rebuild Webster City

Affectionately dubbed “Main Street U.S.A.,” Webster City, Iowa, is a good place to live. It has a rich history of social and economic progress, offering big-town business opportunities with small-town friendliness and sense of community.

The city itself boasts street after street of perfectly maintained homes, new public buildings, and freshly constructed bike path winding through town. Webster City residents know how to make their community a better place to live, gaining national attention for their efforts focusing on energy efficiency.

The U.S. Department of Energy’s (DOE) Rebuild America program helps communities decrease energy costs while improving quality of life and local economies. When Webster City heard of the program, town members were excited to join. “We saw this as a new tool for economic development,” said City Manager Teresa Rotschafer.

THE BEGINNING OF SUCCESS

Rebuild Webster City was established with assistance from the Department of Natural Resources and the Webster City Municipal Utility. A Des Moines-based company, The Energy Group, worked with community leaders to develop strategies for reducing the entire town’s energy consumption by 30 percent. With an average citywide electric energy bill of \$8 million, energy and monetary savings are substantial.

A development team first conducted a market analysis to determine the overall impact of an

energy efficiency program. Indicators reviewed were incremental energy pricing, labor base/employment/unemployment data, contractor commitment, financing availability, and cost per square foot of potential participants.

The partnership’s first year goal was to identify and implement measures that would save the community \$560,000 per year with an initial investment of \$2.24 million. This equates to a 4-year simple payback period - a reasonable first year goal.



The partnership has established relationships with local utilities, vendors, governments and equipment installers to make projects happen. The municipal utility and The Energy Group spearheaded efforts to create a Rebuild Webster City home office on Main Street, along with an “energy store” where customers can buy energy-efficient equipment sold locally at lower prices. Vendors, installers and utilities offer financial incentives to customers that encourage program participation.

The Webster City project maintained “off season” employment in the community, used local

Partnership Facts:

TARGETED BUILDINGS:

Public facilities, churches, schools, commercial and private businesses

SQUARE FOOTAGE:

5,000,000 sq. ft. of commercial and 200,000 sq. ft. of multifamily

ESTIMATED COST SAVINGS:

\$550,000

NEW AND NOTABLE INNOVATIONS:

Won the DOE's National Rebuild America Partnership of the Year Award in 1998

COMPLETION DATE:

On-going

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE CITY OF WEBSTER CITY REBUILD AMERICA PARTNERSHIP:

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resources, and allowed retrofit projects to be financed relatively painlessly "on-the-bill" through the municipal utility. Additionally, local contractors agreed to contribute two percent of all project costs back to the program in exchange for free marketing and work referrals on projects associated with the Rebuild America program.

OUTSTANDING RESULTS

Program improvements include new heating and cooling equipment, improved lighting, installation of water heater blankets, and new geothermal heat pump system in the middle school, which now serves as a model in Iowa. To date, \$50,000 of DOE funding has resulted in \$4.5 million in energy improvements, identified or implemented and almost \$550,000 in annual savings. Public facilities, churches, schools and private businesses have all implemented energy improvements. From the city fire department to the largest employer, Frigidaire, 20 organizations have jumped onto the energy efficiency bandwagon. Webster City serves as a model for the state and nation for saving money, creating jobs and building a better community through energy efficiency.

Funding to pay for improvements was made available through a variety of sources, including city development and utility budgets, grants, charitable donations, energy efficiency options, the utility and a local bank.

NATIONAL AWARD

Through the strong cooperation and commitment between the town's private and public sectors, Webster City earned national attention when it won the Rebuild America's Energy Champion Partnership of the Year Award. Webster City was chosen from 160 community participants across the country for demonstration commitment, innovation and dedication to community and economic sustainability efforts.

Down the road, Rebuild Webster City plans to make nearly \$10 million in improvements by the year 2000, with annual energy cost savings of \$2.5 million. As a result, the town also will gain a healthier environment. With each new success, town members exhibit a modest pride in what they have achieved. "We're a quiet success story," said Rotschafer.

In many towns across the United States, that claim may not be quite as easy to make. But in Webster City, the statement is fully backed by neighborhood know-how.



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